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ABSTRACT

This report describes a research project designed to promote teacher professional development in order to overcome school failure and improve teacher quality, focusing on encouragement of parent participation. The project occurred in a public elementary school in a mid-sized Brazilian city. Several meetings were held between researchers and teachers to discuss parent participation in their children's school life and the need to recognize the parent's point of view about certain school-related themes. A questionnaire was sent to all of the school's parents regarding: subjects they would like to talk about or receive information about; their children's interests; their own interaction with their children's educational activities; relationships with their children's teachers; and their children's problems in school. Results indicated that parents were interested in topics related to school and the process of schooling. Their children's activities included school plays, television, sports, and homework. Most parents closely monitored their children's school activities and had a high level of interest in their children's education. Over half of the parents knew their children's teachers, and over half indicated that their children did not have problems related to education. (Contains 11 references.) (SM)

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ABSTRACT

"LET'S HELP OUR CHILDREN": A BRAZILIAN EXPERIENCE INVOLVING THE HOME - SCHOOL INTERACTION

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This report is directly related to an extended research/action project[1] of continuous teachers education in their workplace complying to a "constructive-collaborative" model which has as its main objective the promotion of teachers professional development in order to overcome school failure and improve teaching quality. The project has been developed in the last three years in an elementary public school located in a medium sized city in the State of São Paulo, Brazil and has been conducted by a group of researchers from the Department of Teaching Methodology of the Education and Human Science Center at the Federal University of São Carlos. The processes and actions in the development of the broader project and the opinion of the group of teachers concerning the necessity of a more intense participation of parents in the school life of their children were the context for the establishment of a pool with these parents. In this way these work was conducted to recognize the parents' point of view about some themes related to the school. It was decided that this pool should address some themes related to the school and would take place through a questionnaire as a first step in its implementation. It was addressed five topic to be investigated: 1. topics that the families would like to discuss with the school staff and teachers; 2. students' extra-class activities; 3. parents'/ families' supervision home task activities; 4. parents' acquaintance of their children's teachers; 5 and, the existence of any type of school problem. About 1.200 questionnaires were applied to students' family. The answers were analyzed by the school teachers and the obtained results contradict the usual opinion encountered at the school culture: that the parents /family doesn't mind / doesn't be involved in the educational processes of their children. Additionally, the results suggests the necessity of an effort in the direction of straighten this kind of relation as a tool to promote de school success and to give subsidies for the initial and continuous of teacher education

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[1] Research/intervention project *"The reflection about the pedagogic action as a strategy of modification of elementary public school in a perspective of continuous formation in the work place"*, conducted by a group of researchers from UFSCar (Federal University of Sao Carlos), sponsored by FAPESP (Support Program for research related to the public education in the State of Sao Paulo) for the period 1996-2000.

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This report is directly related to an extended research/action project[1] of continuous teachers education in their workplace, complying to a "constructive-collaborative" model which has as its main objective the promotion of teachers professional development in order to overcome school failure and improve teaching quality.

The project has been developed in the last three years in an elementary public school located in a medium sized city in the State of Sao Paulo, Brazil. It has been conducted by a group of researchers most of them linked to the Department of Teaching Methodology of the Education and Human Science Center at the Federal University of Sao Carlos. Considering processes and actions in the development of the project and the opinion of the group of teachers concerning the necessity of a more intense participation of parents in the school life of their children, the context for the establishment of a pool with these parents was determined. This pool should address some themes related to the school and would take place through a questionnaire as a first step in its implementation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Davis (1997); Lüdke (1990); Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) among others one of the themes connected to the actual movements striving for changes in the teaching process is related to the collaboration parents/schools/community.

The development of close ties between school and the community it serves is not new. Just to illustrate one may mention the work "Schools and quality" published by OCDE in 1989 which among several proposals about the quality of fundamental school

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emphasizes the high level of support and involvement of parents, turned into support to the school, trough voluntary services and material help in general and motivating and supporting their children in a way to complement the school efforts, in an individual way (Lüdke, 1990). More recently, there is the recommendation from Clinton's administration, in the USA, as one of its key points about the parents' involvement in order to improve children's education outside the school ambient. This recommendation prescribes that *in the year 2000 all the schools should promote partnerships that increase the involvement and the participation of the parents in the providing of a social, emotional and academic development of the children*, taking into consideration their crucial role in the academic success of children..

Nevertheless, the school-families interaction has not always been considered proved in be an effective instrument to the improvement of teaching promoted by educational institutions. Due to the existence of multiform illustrative data showing schools failure in serving all its students, a fact even considering our brazilian reality, it has been emphasized, on one hand, that school's philosophy is not always the same as the family's beliefs. On the other hand, the existence of heterogeneous populations in which backgrounds between teachers and parents is diversified, leads to non-adaptation of these populations, and as a result subjecting them to a risky situation.

Marques (1997), as an example, considering the American and Portuguese realities, points out four kinds of obstacles to the positive interaction between parents and the school. The first is related to the traditional of division between the school and the families. Teachers got used to live a reality in which the parents confer their children to the schools and free themselves from the role of educators. The second is related to the tradition of blaming the parents for the lack of interest in their children's education process. The third is related to the following aspects: change in demographic conditions; increase in women's work outside the home; poverty growth, mainly in big cities; increase in the number of homeless children living; dropping out of school before finishing the elementary school phase. The fourth and last obstacle is related to the kind of relationship between the school and the external world. The connection is restricted to meetings in the beginning of the academic year, eventual meetings of parents and teachers associations and the carrying out of parties where parents should be present. It is possible to say, according to prior data obtained through our research/intervention project to a same school, that these obstacles are also found in our context. It is also possible to say that some of the obstacles present additional components: for example, some teachers frequently attribute the school failure to students' families characteristics; or see the parents as non-cooperative or even non-

efficient in the search for solutions to the classroom's problems, mainly because they see an individual invitation to come to the school as a sign of existing problems with their children..

In regard to the relationship school-families various aspects related to families and the school success are not new in the sociological, psychological and educational areas and have been the subject of a varied literature. Besides that, they point to a complex area of investigation which can be referred to in several ways in theoretical or methodological terms.

In his work, Marques (1997) presents three approaches to the development of programs to straighten schools and families relationship and his ideas are systematized in the Chart 1 below.

Besides the option for one of these three approaches, Marques indicates the importance of considering other aspects. The communication between the school and the parents about the development of their children's process of learning can be done in several ways: conferences, individual heeding, sending of letters, publication of newspapers and use of the school register. The important point is to have a good communication. It is impossible to expect that parents becomes teachers and that teachers take the parent's role. In this situation, each one has its specific role. However, even if people adopt these strategies, schools are not always successful in achieving their goals.

Another aspect shown to be relevant is, under the perspective adopted in this work, knowing better the reasons for the parents to become involved in the school processes of their children as a way to look for additional aspects that facilitate the parents' involvement..

This issue was investigated by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), in the American reality, looking at strong evidence that a successful school-families interaction usually brings benefits to the learning process and school success of the students. According to a theoretical source adopted parents' involvement is a process that can suffer influences from specific aspects in some critical points and can include activities related to the school learning process (as to follow the child's development) done at home, and activities based on the school (as to participate in meetings for parents and teachers). The model proposed by those researchers suggests that this process has several levels of building aspects that operate between the initial option for the parents to get involved (Level 1); the forms or kinds of involvement (Level 2); the tools used for the parent's involvement (Level 3); the mediator aspects (Level 4); and the beneficial influence caused by this involvement in the students' development (Level 5).

CHART 1 - APPROACHES TO THE PROGRAMS OF INVOLVEMENT AMONG SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES, ACCORDING TO MARQUES (1997)

APPROACHES	COMMUNICATION SCHOOL-HOME	INTERACTIVE	PARTNERSHIP
Characteristics	The teachers elucidate and inform the parents what they have to do in order to support their children's learning process. This support can have two forms: a) reinforcement, done by the parents at home, about the things that the teachers work on in class; and a contribution for the children to behave themselves well in class and develop attitudes that facilitate the learning process. B) Transferring of a cultural background that will help the children to do well at the school.	Efforts are made for the students to be fluent in their own culture or in the dominant culture, in a way that they know how to make use of both cultures in complex situations and different contexts. The families are viewed as a source of learning by the school and the necessity of building continuity between the school world and the external world are recognized. To open the schools to the parents, create ways for them to have meetings, provide frequent communication, treat them as members of the community and allow them to know the school curriculum are normal procedures/products.	The school cares about the school progress improvement of the risky children, about the defense of the multiculturalism and about the cooperative control of the schools by the community. To be implemented, it needs a leader or a director with a good educational background, capable to perform a good leadership, able to work as a group. It also demands decision making shared with the teachers; local control of the financial, humanitarian and material sources. The teaching emphasizes an active learning, the enlightenment of the basic skills, the development of a critic way of thinking and of the capability of oral and written expression.
Advantages	The learning of these attitudes is useful and brings benefits to all the social groups.	The mutual respect between parents and teachers and the respect for the minor cultures.	All the teachers, parents and the community share the school mission.
Disadvantages	Lack of time of the parents to dedicate daily attention to their children and linguistic limitations can damage the relationships.	Lack of preparation of the teachers to appreciate the minor cultures; decrease of the access to the dominant culture.	It is possible to have an inequality of the human and material sources among different communities.

Based on their work these authors make recommendations considering the establishment of an ample educational politics and their implementation. The first one is related to the idea that any efforts to involve parents in the school process of their children should be based on the awareness that the parents' beliefs it is a fundamental point for an effective involvement. If the schools do not take into account the parents' contributions any practice towards this goal has no effect. The school-families relationships are established linked with the historical and social interactions between them. Consequently, if it is expected that the children exploit the benefits of having parents/families involved in a constructive way, the parents/families should have - or should be encouraged to create – a personal role that stimulates their active involvement in their children's school education. In a similar way, the parents should have - or should be encouraged to create – a strong sense of effectiveness in helping their children to be successful in school. Therefore, the schools and communities that wish to have access to the benefits brought by parents' involvement should work specifically trying to find ways to establish or even to turn stronger the disposition of parents towards the aspects shown.

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The second recommendation refers to the explicit awareness that part of the educational objectives is based on the emphasis given to the construction of the parents' role and efficiency. The community and school efforts, towards this objective, include the vision of the parents as part of the goals the school has to reach. The social building of the parents' role means that the parents and the group linked to the school should work together in the definition of these roles. In a more specific way, the schools and the teachers should have varied opportunities of systematic interaction with their students' parents seeking, for example, the establishment of a group of expectations built at the same time over the parents' role on their children's school process.

Considering that the first level of parents' involvement – the decision of getting involved in their children's school subjects – is influenced by the type of role constructed, by the sense of efficacy in helping their children being successful at school and by the clauses imposed on parents by the school (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandle, 1997), in the development of this work it was attempted to know the expectations of parents towards the school through the application of a questionnaire elaborated and evaluated in general terms by the teachers.

Before continuing with a report of the procedures adopted and the results achieved, it is convenient to make some considerations about a number of studies that try to relate, for example, certain educational practices used by the family and child school success. They are known as "the study of the interaction processes that take place, daily, in the family life, the description of the 'family atmosphere'..." (p. 97) and are more centered in the relationship component, and the problems related to authority and control involving affection and conflict between parents and children. In general, these studies were developed between the 50's and the 70's and present a variety of empirical results that do not clarify much about these relationships, according to an evaluation made by Forquin (1995).

Other studies try to understand alternative relationships and, in this category, it is mandatory to point out the study developed by Lahire (1997). When he associated the social situation of families and school situation of students in France, using a number of objective indicators (level of formation, professional situations, place where the parents live, level of knowledge of the school system, follow up of the school process, etc.), Lahire identified families that in spite of having a great number of "deficiencies" had children with a successful school life. The evaluation of data from them leads to the conclusion that the theme of parents' omission can be considered a myth produced by teachers who "ignoring the logic of the families' configurations, deduct, based on the students school behavior and

performance, that the parents do not care about their children, allowing them to do things without interfering" (p. 334)

Contrary conclusions to parents' omission as an every-day-happening is also to be found in a study developed in Sao Carlos (state of Sao Paulo, Brazil). In it the parents of children who had failed in school, and whose social situation was deficient, wished a school with quality and compromised with the teaching of practical subject matters and abilities because this, in their opinion, would guarantee a better life. They considered the school as the most important place of learning for their children. Furthermore, other data derived from parents: retention is considered as damaging to the child; the awareness of school procedures to prevent failure; the feeling that they would like that homework be a continuous activity because this would be fundamental for the children learning process; in spite of parents financial problems at the beginning of the school process they do not have great difficulty in keeping their children in school; they would not take their children out of school to work; the school should only approach the family to inform about behavior problems of their children, instead of calling frequent meetings in which the child's school life would be discussed in a group; they stress the lack of knowledge about their children's learning difficulties (Pauleto, Batista, Mello, Reali e Tancredi, 1998).

BUILDING, APPLYING AND ANALYZING THE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE PARENTS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Taking into account the decision to extend the parents' participation in their children's school life and the necessity to recognize the parents' point of view about some themes related to the school, a number of meetings between researchers and teachers took place. The purpose of these meetings was the definition of questions to be asked and the preparation of the questionnaire.

In a first moment the teachers were asked to individually evaluate the themes they thought relevant and necessary to be considered according to their point of view. The discussions, in this occasion, were also related to the idea of how to begin the implementation, after the data collection, and establishing a relationship with the families taking into account the end of the school year. Several ideas came to mind: the use of a morning session of recreations and competitions and talks given by experts. After some thoughts about the lack of time and what would be more pleasant to the parents a talk seemed to be the best choice, as it was seen as a pleasant and light activity, whose themes would be chosen based on the data from the questionnaires.

The school teachers and the university researchers reached the conclusion that it would be necessary to write in a collective way a small explanatory letter. Its final form and the questions will be presented some time later in this report.

As an important activity for the school as a whole, it was decided to address the questionnaire not only to the parents of the students whose teachers participated in the research but to all the parents related to the school. In that way, about 1200 copies of the questionnaires were sent, one to each child, independently of the fact that s/he had brothers or sisters in the school.

After receiving the questionnaires on a established date, the teachers started to tabulate the answers of their classes starting with the questions number 2, 3, 4 and 5. The answers to the questions number 1 were systematized by the researchers due to the big number of answers.

Considering that it was the end of November, some foreseen procedures needed to be changed. After having tabulated the data organized by group, teachers and researchers, gathering the teachers, intended to organize them by grade, in a way that they would have a "map" of each one of them in relation with the different themes explored and, as a third step, a general picture of the school.

LET'S HELP OUR CHILDREN?

The end of the year is near!
We hope we can count on you to work together to assure the school success of your children!
To star our program, we need some informations about you and your child so that we can begin activities to gather together school and families.

1. What are the subjects or themes you would like to talk, discuss or receive information about?
2. What are the activities your son or daughter usually do when she/he is not at school?
3. Do you follow up the school activities of your son or daughter? ( ) Yes ( ) No Why?
4. Have you met your son or daughter's teacher? ( ) Yes ( ) No Why?
5. Does your son or daughter have any difficulties in school? Which ones? What kind?

Considering that because of the end of the school year the teachers were not able to systematize the results obtained from the parents' answer to the questionnaire, the group of

researchers decided to do this task and later do the parents answers evaluation together with the teachers.

From a total of 1200 questionnaires sent 954 were returned. As the posted questions were open ones their answers were evaluated as follow.

In a first moment, the answers to each question were listed and the frequency of occurrence of each one was noted. After that the answers were grouped in categories according to given focus, similarities of information or the preoccupation showed in the different answers. From this, for each of the five questions asked a table with the percentage of the definite categories and with the general result followed. The discussions resulting from this analysis in some cases are followed by examples of the answers given.

GETTING TO KNOW THE FAMILIES BETTER

- ***Subjects or themes that parents would like to talk, discuss or receive information about***

Considering the first question in the questionnaire: *What are the subjects or themes you would like to talk, discuss or receive information about*?, table 1, as shown has a collection of themes that parents expressed wish to discuss with the school.

The results indicated that parents would like to discuss a variety of themes as shown although 165 answers informed that none theme would interest them.

In general, independently of the grade, the most frequent subjects refer to specific information such as introduction to the use of computers, english as a second language and other general subjects (such as: drugs, health, sex, sexual education, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS) or other general subjects such as politics, government, moral, public awareness representing around 34.0% of the indicated themes.

The child, the child in school and his/her development (15.8%), the learning process, the evaluation process and the learning problems (15.1%) were also matter of much interest suggested. In the first case, the most indicated was the child's behavior in the classroom and in the school, questions related to the discipline and social interactions in the school. In the second one, the emphasis was in relation to the development and performance of the student and the evaluation system, the evaluation criteria and the dynamics of attribution of grades.

Table 1 – The themes of interest suggested by parents for different grades

Themes	1st		2nd		3rd		4th		Total	
	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Pedagogical Proposal of the school, curriculum, objectives	4	2.1	9	5.1	10	6.3	7	4.4	30	4.4
2. Teaching/methodology adopted	20	10.5	10	5.7	8	5.0	1	0.6	39	5.8
3. Organization and functioning of the school	30	15.8	23	13.2	25	15.6	17	10.8	95	14.0
4. Specific, general and extra-curriculum contents	50	26.4	55	31.7	57	35.6	69	43.7	231	34.1
5. Learning, learning evaluation, learning problems	21	11.0	28	16.2	30	18.7	23	14.6	102	15.1
6. Teacher	8	4.2	4	2.3	1	0.6	1	0.6	14	2.1
7. Family and relationship school-family	9	4.7	6	3.4	6	3.8	5	3.2	26	3.8
8. The child, the child in school, the child's development	40	21.1	33	19.0	14	8.8	20	12.6	107	15.8
9. Educational politics	8	4.2	6	3.4	9	5.6	15	9.5	38	5.6
Total	190	100	174	100	160	100	158	110	682	100

Aspects related to school organization and functioning (14.0%) were pointed out by parents. In this case, they are concerned about the children's safety at the entrance and exit time; the duration of the classes, the change in the periods; the break; the classroom student's number, among other aspects that where included in this category.

Other themes that parents indicated interest is the teaching process, the adopted school methodology and activities developed by the children (5.8%), besides the pedagogic proposal of the school, its curriculum and its goals (4.4%). In this category were included answers that pointed the school program and the annual calendar, the curriculum and the programmed subjects.

Topics related to the current educational policy (5.6%) is another group of topics that parents showed interest on. The emphasis, in this case, is given to the level and improvement of the teaching processes.

The school-families interaction, and other topics related to family were indicated in around 4.0% of the total of themes.

Although as minor percentage (2.1%), the teachers, their situation; their formation (basic and continuous); their sources of studies; their authority and practices in the classroom, are another group of topics presented by the parents.

In the distribution of the themes by grades, the parents of children in the first and second grades more frequently suggested as topics of interest those related to the child, the child in school and its development, besides the specific, general and curricular subjects pointed formerly. Students parent's from the third grade, instead of themes related to the

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child, indicated a preference for topics related to the learning process, learning evaluation and learning problems.

The analysis of the indicated themes throughout the different grades gives interesting clues for the school to investigate about parents interest's whose children are in the beginning of the schooling process in relation to those whose children attend more advanced grades. When the totality of the indicated themes are considered by grade a relative decrease in the total frequency of the number of subjects pointed out by parents from the first to fourth grades children is observed.

Themes like the teacher (57.0%), the teaching applied (51.3%); the child, the child at school and his/her development (37.4%); the family; the relationships family-school (34.0%) were the most frequently topics indicated by parents whose children are in the first grade.

The child; the child at school and his/her development (30.8%); the pedagogical proposal of the school (30.0%); the teacher and the learning process; the learning evaluation and the learning problems (27.5%) were themes indicated by parents of students in the second grade.

The specific, general and extra-curricular contents were pointed out by about 30% of fourth grade's parents and they also suggested the discussion of other related educational politics themes (39.9%)

Table 2 - Indication of themes of interest by grade

Themes	1st		2nd		3rd		4th		Total	
	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Pedagogical Proposal of the school, curriculum, objectives	4	*13.3*	9	*30.0*	10	*33.4*	7	*23.3*	30	*100*
2. Teaching/methodology adopted	20	*51.3*	10	*25.6*	8	*20.5*	1	*2.6*	39	*100*
3. Organization and functioning of the school	30	*31.6*	23	*24.2*	25	*26.3*	17	*17.9*	95	*100*
4. Specific, general and extra-curriculum contents	50	*21.6*	55	*23.8*	57	*24.7*	69	*29.9*	231	*100*
5. Learning, learning evaluation, learning problems	21	*20.6*	28	*27.5*	30	*29.4*	23	*22.5*	102	*100*
6. Teacher	8	*57.0*	4	*28.6*	1	*7.2*	1	*7.2*	14	*100*
7. Family and relationship school-family	9	*34.6*	6	*23.1*	6	*23.1*	5	*19.2*	26	*100*
8. The child, the child in school, the child's development	40	*37.4*	33	*30.8*	14	*13.1*	20	*18.7*	107	*100*
9. Educational politics	8	*21.0*	6	*15.8*	9	*23.6*	15	*39.6*	38	*100*
Total →[2]	190	*27.9*	174	*25.5*	160	*23.4*	158	*23.2*	682	*100*

[2] The signal (→) indicates that the presented percentages were calculated based on the addition of the

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In general, it seems that the parents show a greater worry about subjects related to the teaching and the methodology adopted by the school at the beginning of schooling. Teacher, family and interaction school-families are themes that are less important throughout the grades. In the case of child, the child at school and his/her development, a decrease is observed in the indications from the first to the third grade, while in the fourth grade there is an increase, apparently due the fact that parents, feel the necessity to talk about subjects related to adolescence. Otherwise, an increase tendency concerning subjects related to learning evaluation, learning problems, the the school pedagogical proposal and its objectives was observed up to the third grade.

For all the other categories a predominant tendency was not identified.

- ***Activities carried out by students outside school***

The second question of the questionnaire tried to obtain informations about children's activities developed outside school time. In this case, 32 questionnaires did not indicate any kind of answer and 19 indicated that the child does "not do anything" or "does not carry out any other activity" besides school activities. Three answers pointed out that children carried out "customary child's activities".

Table 3 presented shows the parents answer's in which the activity nature or kind developed outside the school by their children were specified.

Table 3 - Children's activities outside school time per grade

Activities performed	1st		2nd		3rd		4th		Total	
	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Leisure activities	311	*56.9*	296	*50.7*	254	*51.5*	500	*64.7*	1361	*56.8*
2. Sporty activities	88	*16.1*	116	*19.9*	108	*21.9*	138	*17.9*	450	*18.8*
3. Educational activities	103	*18.9*	124	*21.2*	89	*18.0*	103	*13.3*	419	*17.5*
4. Cultural and artistic activities	32	*5.9*	38	*6.5*	35	*7.1*	24	*3.1*	129	*5.4*
5. Domestic activities	11	*2.0*	6	*1.0*	4	*0.8*	7	*0.9*	28	*1.2*
6. Job	1	*0.2*	1	*0.2*	3	*0.6*	1	*0.1*	6	*0.2*
7. Others	-	-	3	*0.5*	-	-	-	-	3	*0.1*
Total →	546	*22.8*	584	*24.4*	493	*20.6*	773	*32.3*	2396	*100*

The answers given by parents indicated the carrying out by their children of at least six kinds of activities outside the school time. Leisure activities stood out by the high frequency in all the grades. Activities related to "watch TV and video" were the most pointed out with 43.6% of the indications in this category. It is emphasized that there is a

columns in relation to the total amount, instead of the sum of the partial percentages of each column.

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considerable increase in the indication of "watch TV and video" by the fourth grade's parents (55,9%) in relation to the previous grades. "Play", without specifying the kind of play or with whom, was the second more frequent answer (29.5%). "Cycling" and "playing" (video game, racing system, "Taz", Lego) were pointed out in the same proportion (8.6%) of the times. Other activities such as entertainment activities, roller skating and skating, "playing with the dog, doll, friend" were also pointed out but less frequently.

The second category defined was carrying out sport activities. Several sport modalities were pointed out and the most frequent were playing soccer (49.9%), swimming (28.4%) and dancing(ballet, tap dance and jazz) (12.4%). Except, in the case of playing soccer, which indication increases as the grades succeed, the other parent's answers did not show a definite tendency when the results per grade are analyzed.

The carrying out of educational activities outside the school composes the third category identified. It was indicated 419 times or 17.5% in the answers which specifies the kind of activity carried out by children. "Do homework" (30.3%) and "study" (24.3%), the carrying out of "reinforcement activities", "private classes", "Kumon" (15.3%) are the most frequent activities identified in this category. The "reinforcement classes" are the most indicated by parents of the two first grades students. The carrying out of courses such as "english courses", "computer courses", "catechism", and "religious teaching" are also mentioned and by the data it is possible to verify the increase of its frequency along the four grades.

The frequency to other schools and schools/institutions, such as the ones offered by the town council, which used the form of entertainment was indicated by about of 12.0% of the answers.

"Read", "read newspapers" (46.5%) and "craft work" (31.0%) are the most indicated cultural and artistic activities carried out by children out of school time. It is pointed out by 5.4% of the parents who answered affirmatively to the second question and the indications of what kind of activities are carried out outside the school. Doing domestic activities, here understood as "taking care of the brother/sister", "do shopping", "helping the parents", was pointed out in about 1% of the answers considered here. There was an indication that six of the students work (have a job).

These results suggest that the investigated school student's perform a variety of activities outside school time and which are not directly related to the school specific contents such as the case of leisure activities. However, the information that mainly the two first grades children carry out a group of educational complementation or remedial

activities outside school like "reinforcement classes", "private classes", "Kumon" stand out. It would be desirable to investigate more deeply the reasons, characteristics and consequences of this kind of precautions: if they are school prescription or if they refer to parents' initiative; if they are performed accordingly to the classrooms' works, or if they , in fact, result in an improvement in the levels of the learning process of the students, for example.

- ***The family follow up of the children's school activities***

In relation to the third question: *Do you follow the school activities of your child? Why?* There were only 16 blank answers and the systematization of the data is showed on table 4.

The vast majority of the parents who answered this question, follow up their children's school activities. For those who answered negatively, difficulties related to work, lack of time or not living with the child were pointed out.

About 13.0% of the parents stated to follow up their children's school activities without justifying their reasons. Thirteen categories were defined about the various reasons presented by the parents or their dedication to the follow up of their children's school activities and one more is related to the kind of activity performed by them in this kind of activity.

The most frequent category pointed out by the parents independently of the grade the child is attending, is related to the perception of the necessity to be close to the child in all the phases of his/her development, to participate actively in his/her upbringing and in his/her life (20.4%). Some of these answers are: "The follow up of the parents is necessary in all the steps of the child's life"; "observe his/her intellectual development, his/her progress" and "to participate in his/her upbringing".

Three other categories related to the data stood out: The first is attached to the importance of the parents being alert, to follow up the academic life of their children without any kind of justifications: 13.6% of the answers were included in this category.

The second is related to verifying the learning process, to the outcomes of the child, to the teaching applied, to the specific contents and the difficulties faced in the classroom. This category is showed by approximately 13.0% of the answers to the question about the kind of follow up offered by the parent. It includes answers like: "Verify if the child is learning", "to become acquainted with the teaching method", "to check if the subject is updated", "to evaluate the child's school development, the child's knowledge and the child's

performance".

The third category is related to the idea of helping the children; help to clarify doubts; orientate; reinforce; help to a better understanding; offer extra-classes help; without the indication of the reasons or cause of the kind of initiatives (11.3%).

Table 4 - Information about parent's school activities follow up in the different grades

Information about school activities follow up	1st		2nd		3rd		4th		Total	
	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. No, without justification	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.4	1	0.1
2. No, because I cannot ... I do not know how to read ... I do not live ...	6	2.4	3	1.1	10	4.8	4	1.6	23	2.4
3. Yes, without justification	20	7.9	43	16.2	32	15.3	35	14.1	130	13.3
4. Yes, it is important	25	9.9	11	4.1	37	17.7	16	24.1	133	13.6
5. Yes, it is necessary to be close to the child, it is part of the parents' job	62	24.4	64	24.1	23	11.0	50	20.1	199	20.4
6. Yes, to verify learning, production, the teaching methods, the contents, the difficulties...	33	13.0	36	13.6	29	13.9	29	11.6	127	13.0
7. Yes, to help the teacher	5	2.0	1	0.4	-	-	-	-	6	0.6
8. Yes, and what is done	-	-	4	1.5	1	0.5	1	0.4	6	0.6
9. Yes, to help the child	42	16.5	35	13.2	12	5.7	21	8.4	110	11.3
10. Yes, to incentive, motivate...	19	7.5	15	7.5	14	6.7	4	1.6	52	5.3
11. Yes, because it is the parents' duty	4	1.6	13	4.9	10	4.8	8	3.2	35	3.6
12. Yes, because there is interest, worries...	7	2.8	3	1.1	9	4.3	7	0.4	36	3.7
13. Yes, for pleasure...	10	3.9	4	1.5	5	2.4	4	1.6	23	26
14. Yes, because the child needs, has the necessity...	13	5.1	19	7.2	12	5.7	7	2.8	51	5.2
15. Yes, to reach a better learning...	7	2.3	14	5.3	15	7.2	8	3.2	44	4.5
16. Yes, to update myself	1	0.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.1
Total	254	26.0	265	27.0	209	21.4	249	25.5	977	100

The other defined categories occurred in a lower frequency and include different manifestations about how it is important to follow up the children's school works: to rise the child and his/her work (5,3%); for specific necessities (5.2%); in order to help the child to show a better performance (4.5%), among others.

The analysis of the results, accordingly to the grades attended by the children of the answering parents, shows that in the first and second grades, reasons related to the necessity of the parent/parents being close to the child and this activity is seen as being part of the parent's role related to their children are emphasized. Helping the child and considering the activity as important, with the justification of being aware of their children's school life, in the case of the first grade, or only the statement of doing this follow up, by the parents of the second grade children, were also answers often pointed out.

For the third and fourth grades, the emphasis is on the answers that indicate that parents follow up their children and their school activities, and on those answers that refer

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to the necessity to follows up their children's life more closely.

Such answers are consistent with the manifested interests by parents in a prior analysis in relation to the subjects more directly connected to the classroom, the teaching method and methodology pointed out by the school and in relation to the teacher, this mainly in the first two grades.

Considering this kind of information, the school could offer tools to the parents towards increasing their competence in this kind of task, orientating them the best way they should supervise homework, for example.

- ***Parents personal acquaintance of their children's teacher***

The information about parents personal acquaintance with their children's teacher was obtained in the fourth question of the questionnaire. This question were not answered by 18 parents and the great majority of the children belonged to the fourth grade. The confirmation of their knowledge of their children's teacher without any kind of justification was indicated in 513 questionnaires. There were only five questionnaires without the indication of the reason for the negative answer.

Thirty-nine answers also indicated the no acquaintance with the teacher by the parents, but in those, the following justifications were presented: work out of the house, work out of the town (10 or 25.6%); lack of opportunities (6 or 15.4%) or lack of time to go to the meetings; lack of time ("I cannot go to school"); incompatibility of schedule (5 or 12.8%) or else: "my daughter has not been at school for very long", "I don't go to the meetings".

Table 5 has the categorization of the answers "yes", which are followed by the reasons pointed out by the parents for the acquaintance with their child teacher's.

The category in which parents justify the acquaintance with their child teacher's by their participation in the activities promoted by the school got 62.0% of the affirmative answers to the forth question. In this category answers like : "I participate in the meetings", "I participate in meetings of the Parents and Teachers Association", and " I take part in the schools parties" were included. It becomes evident that as the grades succeed there is an increase in the percentage of this kind of justification.

Table 5 - Reasons pointed out by parents for the personal acquaintance their children teacher per grade

Yes, I know personally the teacher of my child because...	1st		2nd		3rd		4th		Total	
	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. I participate inthe activities promoted by the school	46	*48.9*	56	*56.0*	66	*64.1*	92	*74.8*	260	*61.9*
2. I think it is important	24	*25.5*	24	*24.0*	22	*21.4*	15	*12.2*	85	*20.2*
3. I follow the activities performed	6	*25.0*	7	*7.0*	13	*12.6*	5	*4.1*	31	*7.4*
4. There are positive and important characteristics	6	*25.0*	4	*4.0*	-	-	3	*2.4*	13	*3.1*
5. The teacher is someone important in the child's life	5	*5.3*	1	*1.0*	-	-	1	*0.8*	7	*1.7*
6. I knew her previously from other places	3	*3.2*	3	*3.0*	-	-	4	*3.1*	10	*2.4*
7. Other reasons	4	*4.3*	5	*5.0*	2	*1.9*	3	*2.3*	14	*3.3*
Total	94	*22.4*	100	*23.8*	103	*24.5*	123	*29.3*	420	*100*

The answers that point out that "think that this acquaintance is important" constitute the second position of answers identified. In this case answers that indicated this idea as "an obligation", "a duty of the parents to know the teachers" were gathered together. A decreasing tendency in this kind of justification is noticed in the parents of the children in the first grade compared with the children's parents of the fourth grade.

The third identified category is formed by the answers related to the "follow up school activities " as the reason for the personal acquaintance the child teacher's. "I think it is important to follow up the performance,... the development", "...to know how the teaching method has been applied", "...follow up his/her activities", are examples of the answers identified in this category.

The other answers obtained constituted less frequent categories in relation to those presented previously.

Considering these results it would be interesting for the school to search for alternatives to get closer to their teachers-families interactions. In order to do that parents answer's to this first and third questions could work as clues to outline actions directed to a real partnership in consonance with the opinion showed by them and related to the importance and to the interests they have in relation to the follow up of their children's school days/works.

- ***The parents indications about the existence or not of school problems related to their children***

Considering the parent's point of view, the fifth question tried to approach the existence or not of any academic difficulties, and, if this is the case, which is the difficulty faced by their children and the reason why it occurs.

To this question 525 parents indicated the non-existence of problems or difficulties at school concerning their children. They are children that under their view, are doing well and follow without difficulty the activities proposed in the classroom. Seven parents pointed out that their children sporadically show some kind of difficulty; one says "many"; four "a lot"; "all the difficulties"; "in all the various disciplines" and two answered only "yes".

The other parents indicated in their answers some kind of difficulty in their children's school development. From the whole collection of the difficulties indicated there were identified those related to the carrying out of activities in the area of mathematics, reading and writing, and in other components (table 6). The obtained answers also made it possible to draw the reasons for the children's difficulty pointed out by their parents.

Table 6 - Area in which the children present school difficulties according to their parents per grade

Area	1st		2nd		3rd		4th		Total	
	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. In Mathematics	19	*24.0*	44	*36.4*	29	*52.7*	26	*46.4*	128	*37.9*
2. In Reading and Writing	60	*76.0*	75	*62.0*	25	*45.5*	30	*53.6*	190	*61.1*
3. Other contents	-	-	2	*1.6*	1	*1.8*	-	-	3	*9.6*
Total	79	*25.4*	121	*38.9*	55	*17.7*	56	*18.0*	311	*100*

Reading and writing, independently of the grade, was the most difficult area or content subject pointed out by the parents (61.1%). In these cases the difficulties most frequently indicated were the following: *reading* - "does not distinguish the words", "shows difficulties in the interpretation and the comprehension of the texts"(29%); *writing* - "writes as it is pronounced", "changes letters", "shows problems with orthography ", "writes wrong words", "change syllables" (22.6%), and "in portuguese" without specifying what the difficulty is (25.8%).

The area of Mathematics is mentioned in second place and the most frequent answer is "Mathematics specifically" without any further details (62.5%). This kind of answer is followed by the ones that mention children's difficulties in the carrying out of mathematical operations (9.4%); multiplication table (7,0%), and in solving Mathematical problems (4.6%). Although being pointed out other curriculum contents, , present much lower incidence.

Eight parents pointed out the existence of "learning difficulties"; difficulty "to learn", "in the study", "in performing the tasks", without offering more details about the problems faced by their children.

The great majority of the answering parents, nevertheless, pointed out to some

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characteristics of their children, as well as to the aspects related to the way in which they perform the school activities.

These two categories, complemented by a third one, which included other aspects linked to the occurrence of the difficulties, compose an assemblage of indications about their children's school difficulties. These results are presented in the table 7.

The characteristic of the child, the first category of indications presented, was established from answers such as: "is absented mind/ or forgetful", "has lack of concentration", "shows little attention", "does not pay attention", or else: "is distracted", "lazy", "agitated".

This category included answers that, in some ways, mentioned some peculiarity of the child that could be interfering in the learning process.

Table 7 - Child school difficulties indicators according to their parents per grades

Indications	1st		2nd		3rd		4th		Total	
	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Characteristics of the child	22	*53.7*	29	*63.0*	15	*53.6*	8	*42.1*	74	*55.2*
2. How they perform school activities	14	*34.1*	17	*37.7*	12	*42.9*	9	*47.4*	52	*38.8*
3. Others	5	*12.2*	-	-	1	*3.6*	2	*10.5*	8	*6.0*
Total	41	*30.6*	46	*34.3*	28	*20.9*	19	*14.2*	134	*100*

The mention that the children are forgetful and distracted appears in about 66.0% of the answers that were included in this first category and it was the most frequently pointed out for the students in the second, first, third and fourth grades in this order, respectively..

The parents description's of their children's performance to the school activities could be considered an important information source to the knowledge of the students difficulties. In this second category, answers such as: "does not want to participate in the activities", "gets nervous during the test", "does not finish copying the task on the board" were included.

The content of these indicated answers illustrates or attempts to describe the child's behavior. In general behaviors that can be interpreted as inadequate, like: "to make a mess", or different from the expected behavior, such as: "be in a hurry to finish a task", "not to follow up other children", "not to follow up the pace of the classroom" are mentioned.

There was, in this category, a relative dispersion in the answers. Few of them approached the same pattern of behavior or circumstance.

The third identified category gathered answers like: "violence in the classroom or outside the classroom", "distance from the school to the house", "location of the classroom", which did not present a shared characteristic or links between each other.

Subsequent analysis to a survey like this could try to relate the teachers' point of view about each one of the defined categories - the area in which the child presents difficulties and its indications - with the ones expressed by the parents.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE RESULTS

Having analyzed the data obtained, it seems to be necessary that teachers think about the parents' answers related to the questionnaire considering their nature, the amount of information obtained, and the total number of questionnaires answered - about 80.0% of the 1200 sent. Nevertheless, it is possible, at first, to emphasize:

1. The parent's interest expressed in relation to school topics and the schooling process of their children contradicts an idea that apparently is part of the culture of the brazilian schools: the one that says that parents do not worry too much about the school subjects and that they are not interested in talking or discussing about it.

2. According to the obtained data, it is possible to infer that the children in the investigated school plays, watch TV, carry out sporting activities, among others, besides dedicating themselves to doing the homework and to studying, when they are not at school, as expected of any child at this age in our culture.

3. The great majority of the parents indicated to follow up their children's school activities. The reasons most frequently pointed out by the answering parents suggest the recognition of the importance of a close watch, step by step, to what their children learn and do at school. This result reinforces the perception that parents are closely involved with the school and its works.

4. The results about acquaintance with their children's teacher are another aspect that helps to compound the parental pattern on school matters in the analyzed context. The indication of the frequency of their participation in the activities promoted by the school suggests, once more, the high level of interest they nurture about their children's education.

5. The indication of the existence of academic difficulties and the nature of these are another interesting focus for further investigations. From one hand, it can represent the

parents' point of view, elaborated from the school evaluations including teacher's judgments about the student's schooling process . On the other hand, it may be a result of the parent's follow up of their children's school development.

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